

Letter from Elsie Bell Grosvenor to Lamar Trotti, January 6, 1939

Not sent Original returned to Mrs. Grosvenor 2/24/39 January 6, 1939 Mr. Lamar Trotti, Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, Beverly Hills, Hollywood, California My dear Mr. Trotti:

I want to tell you again how much I liked your representation of my father and mother. I think you have caught their spirit in a truly wonderful way. My mother's intense interest in everything that my father did, and the way she backed him up in every way throughout their whole life together is well told in your portrayal of their early lives.

My father was full of enthusiasm and had a great deal of personal magnetism but he always wanted an interested audience to listen to his ideas and to encourage him either by sympathy, or by argument, to go ahead. All this, it seems to me, you have shown very graphically in your scenario, but I still cannot help feeling that you are making a mistake in omitting the scene at the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia.

It has occurred to me that perhaps you have been looking at this scene from the wrong angle. It is possible to approach it in two entirely different ways. I think that you have been looking at it with the idea of making Dom Pedro, the Emperor of Brazil, play the dominant role, and that you felt that Queen Victoria is a much better known figure to Americans and to the world at large than Dom Pedro, and that, therefore, this scene would detract from the Queen Victoria scene if it were put in. I can see your point and agree with you that it would, if Dom Pedro was played up too much.

But the story, as my father and mother told it to me over and over again 2 as a child and as a young woman, and as they told it dozens of times to telephone people and to their close friends, is an entirely different one than the scene you have in mind. It is a scene in

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which Mabel, my mother, takes the principal part. It is an important part of their love story. May I try to tell you the story as my parents told it to me?

As all space at the Philadelphia Exposition of 1876 allotted to electrical exhibits had been taken, Mr. Hubbard had arranged at the last moment to exhibit Bell's telephone invention with the Massachusetts State educational exhibit, of which Hubbard was chairman. The judges were to examine the electrical exhibits on Saturday and Sunday and Mr. Hubbard felt that it was absolutely essential that Bell be on hand to explain his invention to the judges. Mr. Hubbard at that time was heart and soul behind Mr. Bell's invention of the telephone and a firm believer of its importance and its value to the world. Bell had a previous engagement to give an examination to his teachers' class Saturday and insisted that he could not go to Philadelphia that weekend. Instead, he said he would show Willy Hubbard, Mabel's cousin, all about the telephone and he could demonstrate it at the Exposition for him. But Willy Hubbard was a young man who lacked self-confidence, and Mr. Hubbard didn't feel that he was the right person to put the invention across. After failing to persuade Bell, he appealed to his daughter Mabel and asked her to convince her fiance that he must go to the Exposition himself. He told her that Bell's presence was absolutely necessary, that his whole career and the success of the telephone depended on his being there to meet the judges.

Mabel got in touch with Bell and tried to persuade him to go to Philadelphia, but he told her there wasn't any use in talking about it any longer as he absolutely couldn't go. Then Mabel suggested that they drive down to the station to see Willy Hubbard off, so that he could give him final instructions. She had arranged, unbeknownst to him, to have his bag packed and at the station, and had also arranged with Willy to have a ticket and accommodations ready for Bell. When they arrived at the station Willy was there to greet them and told Bell that he had his ticket and his bag, and that the train would be leaving in a few minutes. Then Bell turned stubborn and said, "I told you, Mabel, that I cannot possibly leave my teachers' class." Mabel then argued that his assistant could take care of his class but that no one could show off his invention as well as he could. "Willy knows

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something about it, but he can't begin to explain details in the way you can. My father says it is absolutely necessary that you be there." All the while they were talking she walked steadily on through the station, on to the platform, through the gates and toward the train.

The conductor announced that the train was ready to go. Willy Hubbard said good-bye and jumped on the train, and still Mr. Bell would not go. Suddenly Mabel in her despair burst into tears and cried that she would break her engagement off if he wouldn't do that much for her. Bell was overcome by the sight of her in tears, having never seen her cry before, and declaring that he would get off at the next station, jumped on the rear platform of the last car just as it was pulling out of the station.

Now, Mr. Trotti, don't you think that you could work that up into a very nice scene?

The next day when my father was at the Exposition the judges, as you know, made their rounds. It was very hot, and, as at the end of the day they approached my father's exhibit, they were too weary and said that they could not look at another thing. My father was in despair for his would have been the next for inspection, and he was returning to Boston that night for his classes at Boston University. Suddenly an old gentleman who was accompanying the judges, — Dom Pedro, Emperor of Brazil, whom Bell had met a short time before in Boston when he had shown him through the school for the deaf, recognized young Bell and came to him exclaiming, "How do you do, Professor Bell? What are you doing here? How are the deaf mutes of Boston?"

My father hurriedly explained that he had an invention to exhibit and asked Dom Pedro if he wouldn't like to see it. The Emperor asked what it was and Bell explained that it was an electric speaking telephone and that you could by the use of this apparatus talk from room to room and from city to city. Dom Pedro asked whether it could talk Portuguese, and Bell said "Yes". He urged him to come and see it. Dom Pedro then turned to the judges and asked them to please examine this one more instrument as he knew Mr. Bell and himself wanted to see the invention.

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You, of course, know the rest of the scene; the judge's exclamation of "My God, it talks! Your papers doubtless describe it all in detail.

Sir William Thompson, the most important scientist among the judges, when he returned to England, said that the most wonderful thing that he had seen in America was the speaking telephone, and my father found himself famous overnight. There were headlines in all of the papers and an invitation to come to England to look after his English patents, with the possibility of showing the invention to Queen Victoria.

It doesn't seem to me that this scene detracts in any way from the Queen Victoria scene, as you can soft-pedal the regal part of Dom Pedro's interest in the telephone. Dom Pedro was a very democratic old man. The contrast between his democracy and the formality of the British court would, I think, make a fine sequence. Dom Pedro went around everywhere by himself, while Queen Victoria didn't even address a single question to my father herself, but spoke to him through her son, her daughter or her secretary. So formal was the audience.